COSTUMES

ON THE

WESTERN COAST

OF

AFRICA

BY

AN OFFICER OF THE COMMISSARIAT.

(T. W. R[illegible])

"Sketches roughly drawn with just enough of touch to shew the subject."

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INTRODUCTION.

Most Writers covet public favor, and some seek the patronage of distinguished Individuals as a recommendation to their works. Both of these in their proper season may be desirable, but in a publication of so trifling a nature as the present, the Author does not think it essential to court the one, or aspire to the other, leaving it to take its own course and by way of novelty, dedicating it to those on whom he is most dependant for happiness, his Wife and Children.

Having thus far premised, he proceeds to observe, that the following work contains nothing more or less than what the title expresses, "Costumes on the Western Coast of Africa," to which are added short explanatory notes, extracted from a Journal kept during his leisure moments for the amusement of his own family and immediate friends; and certainly, at the period of transmission to England, in 1829, without the most distant idea of their ever appearing in any other than their manuscript form.

The Sketches have in themselves no other merit than that they relate to a Colony comparatively little known; and as it was thought, that a few of the characters residing in Sierra Leone, the whole drawn from life, would not be unacceptable to those, who really feel a lively interest in the cause of Africa, the present plan has been adopted, at the pressing instance of some friends, and not from any ostentatious desire on the part of the Author to force himself upon the public; and under this feeling it is intended to strike off, only a limited number of copies from each of the six plates composing the present set, leaving the continuation of the publication to time and circumstances.

However insignificant this little production may appear, those, who happen to see it, ought, at least, to bear in mind the motives, which led to its being thus brought forward; and consequently it is to be hoped, the critical eye will be generous enough to make every allowance, and receive it with all its imaginary or real imperfections.

Camberwell, 1.st *September* 1831.

LIBERATED AFRICANS.

Among the several classes of inhabitants forming the population of Sierra Leone, none perhaps has a greater claim upon public sympathy than that denominated "Liberated Africans;" in other words, those who, under the auspices of the British Government, have been delivered from slavery through the exertions of our ever watchful and zealous cruisers. The accompanying plate, is intended to convey an idea of the appearance of such individuals on their being first landed from a *slaver*, and of their subsequent appearance when they have resided some time in the colony. The two figures on the left, marked N.° 1, exhibit the former, and N.° 2 the latter.

The sufferings of slaves on board ship have been so often and ably depicted, that the writer conceives any further attempt to describe them quite unnecessary; merely observing, that only those who have ever witnessed the horrors of a slave ship can form any adequate idea of them. It is at the same time a pleasing task to state, that every possible attention, so far as their means will admit, is paid to the captured negroes by the naval officers in charge of them: indeed, too much praise cannot be bestowed on the *prize masters*, for their humane and benevolent exertions to alleviate the sufferings of the wretched beings placed under their special protection, during their voyage to Sierra Leone; and it is also satisfactory to know, that, generally, these unfortunate and degraded people are sensibly alive to the kindness shewn them.

In 1825 the writer had an opportunity of witnessing, in the village of *Wellington*, the joy manifested by between twenty and thirty of the recently imported negroes on meeting with a friend of his (Lieutenant C——) who a few months before had, in the above capacity, brought them up to the colony; and whose surprise at this unexpected *rencontre* was only equalled by the unsophisticated pleasure and gratitude evinced by these poor creatures in recognising their late kind hearted shipmate. What Lieutenant C——'s feelings were on the occasion, are better conceived than described.



1. LIBERATED AFRICANS. 2.

AFRICAN MINSTRELS.

In all parts of Africa are to be found musicians; those introduced in the annexed Plate are from Sangara, distant a few days journey from Teembo already mentioned, and are denominated *Yelly* or *Jelly-Men*, a sort of privileged itinerant beggars.

Their vocation, like that of the Bards of old, is to travel about from town to town, singing the praises of those who reward them liberally; but they freely vent their sarcasms on such persons as have the ill luck to fall under their displeasure.

It is during the grand feast of *Rhamadan* that they are in the greatest request, when they are usually engaged before hand by some of the Chiefs; who, wishing to have their warlike or other deeds celebrated, hire them from ostentatious motives, and at some expense, during these public festivals: the accompanying figures were sketched by me at one of these feasts on the *Bullom* shore, opposite Sierra Leone, at the residence of *Dalla Mahomadoo*, a native Chief.

The instruments herein represented are the drum, the flute, and the notched stick: the former is beaten with open hands; the flute is made from a species of reed, having only two or three holes, and is principally played with the fore finger, producing a wild, discordant, and monotonous sound: the right hand is occasionally used to flourish in the air the horse hair brush, which is seen hanging on the right wrist of the performer.

The latter instrument or notched stick, as may be anticipated, destroys all harmony, if there be any to be found in African music; and is only played, or rather literally speaking *scraped*, when the scraper is not engaged in singing.

The head dress of the two figures on the right is nothing more than a red cloth cap, covered with small shells called *cowries*, and ornamented with tufts of horse hair on each side: these grotesque caps are only worn during the time of performance.



AFRICAN MINSTRELS.

A KROO-MAN.

WEST-AFRICA.

The people inhabiting the Kroo country (Grain Coast) are a fine race of men, distinguished for their muscular and robust make, and great agility.

They are very industrious, and like the "*Galegos*" in Portugal, migrate to Sierra Leone for a certain number of years with a view to obtain work: at the expiration of their periodical emigration they return to their country, when each individual is expected to bring a present to his King; in default of which, he is severely punished and not unfrequently loses the whole of his property.

From their tractability and willingness to work, the merchants generally employ them in the timber trade, and a certain number are usually attached to our ships of war on the Coast; they also engage themselves as cooks, grooms or body servants; in all these employments they excel, particularly in the first, but from their great *penchant* to "sleight of hand," very few are hired in the last capacity, and like the Lacedemonians they consider it no crime to steal, but disgraceful to be detected in a theft.

The Kroos are Pagans, and it is very remarkable that notwithstanding their long intercourse with Europeans, not one single conversion to Christianity has been effected; it is equally strange that in no instance has a Kroo-man been known to be sold as a slave.

The annexed figure is a faithful representation of my cook "*Dippy*" who is supposed to be returning from the fish market: wishing to appear on this occasion "a gentleman," as he informed me, he dressed himself in a dandyfied waistcloth, and took the liberty to use my umbrella, an article they are particularly proud of exhibiting.

The language of the Kroo people is highly guttural and is pronounced in a disagreeable singing tone. Their forehead, temples, and breast are commonly tattooed, and the colour of their skin varies from a jet black to a light brown.



A KROO MAN.

West Coast of Africa.

FOOLAHS.

The country inhabited by the Foolahs is called Footah. It is of considerable extent, and divided into several districts, and lies in a north east direction from Sierra Leone, from whence Teembo, its capital, is considered to be between two and three hundred miles distant.

The Foolahs are a warlike people, and not unfrequently engaged in predatory warfare with each other, for the purpose of procuring slaves.—They are strict observers of the Mahomedan law, and employ themselves chiefly in agriculture, and the rearing of cattle, which latter they bring down, together with gold in rings, and ivory, to Sierra Leone, taking in return European goods.

The figures in Plate N.° 1, represent MAMADOO TONKARA and KIBBEE, brother and sister to TICKLA MOODU, a Mandingo Chief or Head-man lately residing at *Mabelly*, but driven out of it by a powerful tribe, the *Cossoos*, who declared war against him for some acts of cruelty and oppression on his part.

Plate N.° 2, represents MAMADOO YAROO on the left hand, and SOOFEEANAH TAOOREE on the right; the former an embroiderer by trade, and the latter a Bookman or writer of the Koran, but both of them nevertheless general traders.

The ornaments seen upon the necks of the two figures on the left hand in Plates N.° 1, and 2, are called in the language of the country "Greegrees." They contain extracts from the Koran, and are looked upon as effectual Charms against all accidents.

The spear in the hand of SOOFEEANAH TAOOREE is carried solely as a weapon of defence against the attacks of wild animals, the characters of Bookmen and Itinerant Musicians being universally respected throughout Africa.

PLATE N.º 1.



FOOLAHS.

Interior of Africa.

PLATE N.° 2.



FOOLAHS

JOLOFFS.

The Joloffs or Yolloffs, (as the word is often pronounced) are a numerous and powerful tribe, inhabiting a country to the northward of Sierra Leone, situated between the rivers Senegal and Gambia, and extending to the Coast.

Formerly many of them were rescued from bondage by the activity of our Cruisers, and brought into the colony: of late years however, there have been but few importations from that quarter, and it is therefore to be hoped, that the nefarious traffic in human flesh has ceased in that neighbourhood altogether; but the means of verifying this are withheld, owing to the British ships of war being chiefly employed in an opposite direction (Bight of Benin) where the slave trade has of late been on the increase.

The religion of the Joloffs is the Mahomedan, although Pagans are still to be found among them; and judging by those in the colony under the head of "Liberated Africans," they appear to be of industrious habits.

Many of the Joloff women residing in Sierra Leone are " free born, " and come from the French settlements of Senegal and the Island of Goree. Persons of this description, frequently visit the British possessions on the Coast in search of employment; they are good nurses, and generally understand well the culinary art, and the getting up of linen: by this last occupation many of them earn a livelihood, whilst others again seek it in a less creditable manner.

The annexed figures are introduced to shew the style of dress peculiar to the females of Goree and Senegal, which is a mixture of the Eastern and European, though perhaps partaking more of the former than of the latter. Like the generality of the *sable Nymphs* they shew an extravagant fondness for tawdry ornaments of every kind.



JOLOFFS.

From Senegal.